

NUMBER 56.

Quarterly

AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY



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Cover

ALEKO KYRIAKOS (b.1937)

Sappho Bronze, 39 inches high, 75½ inches long

Purchased 1972

Sappho

a bronze by Aleko Kyriakos

A healthy amount of controversy has been generated by the commissioning, for the Edmiston Sculpture Court, of an original bronze by Aleko Kyriakos, entitled *Sappho* (illustrated on the cover).

Kyriakos is a Greek sculptor of note, born in 1937, whose art training was received in Athens prior to his residence in the United States for a number of years. His architectural commissions have been numerous and significant. They include impressive works at: Swarthmore College, Franklin and Marshall College (three works), Albright College, St John's Church, Allentown, etc. Important bronzes by Kyriakos are in public collections such as the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Art (two), Allentown Art Museum (two), Wellesley College, Kutztown State College, St Frances de Sales (two), Lafayette College and so on. He also figures in many public and private collections, mostly in the United States, despite the fact that the artist's singular independence of mind has made him turn down, year after year, the offers of commercial galleries wishing to represent him.

Kyriakos is imbued with the spirit of synthesis and mystery of archaic Greece and draws from these roots statements that are both deeply felt

and monumentally convincing. When his *Sappho* has been on view for an appreciable period on one of the upper levels of the Edmiston Court, it seems evident that the Gallery's public and the general public of Auckland, passing daily on Kitchener Street, will come to appreciate the original beauties of this work. They will come to sense the fact that it is derivative only in terms of undying spirit and is not tributary to any contemporary works by other sculptors.

It must also be pointed out that *Sappho* is the first casting of the artist's original concept. The Swarthmore piece of the same name, frequently reproduced in the press, although cast earlier, was merely an enlarged version which the artist was very reluctant to make. The Swarthmore commission on a different scale had required, in the sculptor's view, a number of changes of the original concept and full-scale model to accord with an architectural setting, modified by other changes in plans.

The sculptor has given *Sappho* two different patinas: if automobile exhaust is intense, the bronze will blacken. If air proves to be purer than one might fear, this splendid work will become progressively greener to harmonise with the background of Albert Park.

RICHARD TELLER HIRSCH



1. CHARLES DESPIAU (1874-1946)
Portrait of Anne Morrow Lindbergh
Bronze, 15 inches high
Purchased by the Mackelvie Trust, 1971
(see page 4)

A portrait by Charles Despiau : Anne Morrow Lindbergh

The Landes district in south-west France on the Bay of Biscay is a region of heath, sand, and marsh, interspersed with pine forests, oak plantations, and vineyards. Here, in the capital town of Mont-de-Marsan – a town where the principal industries are those of the woods and fields, a town of no pretensions to art or antiquities – was born on 4 November 1874 the sculptor Charles Despiau, the son and grandson of master plasterers. Neither in his youthful environment nor in his ancestry was there any encouragement towards the fine arts; though a childhood of watching his artisan father working in plaster perhaps explains why, throughout his life, Despiau was to be more at home modelling with hands and fingers than carving in stone.

Born and raised in isolation from the art centres of France, Despiau was always to retain a simplicity of character, a reservedness of disposition, a lack of interest in self-aggrandisement, and an inability to express in words what he so eloquently expressed in his work. Despite an early association with Auguste Rodin, he holds an isolated position in the stream of modern sculpture. More perhaps than any other sculptor Despiau, in his mature work, was free of external styles and influences and tricks of the trade. No theories, no preconceptions, no associative ideas came between the sculptor and his model. In a period of frenzied cross-fertilisation he remained untouched, even though he spent his entire working life in Paris.

His first teacher of design, at the local lycée, was a certain M. Morin, a drawing master who also did a little sculpturing of busts. It was perhaps with his encouragement that Despiau, at the age of sixteen, left for Paris and enrolled, first at the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs under Hécator Lemaire, a pupil of Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux,

and afterwards at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in the studio of Louis-Ernest Barrias, a champion of the Classical style. Now, for the first time, the young aspiring sculptor was exposed to the great masters of the past, spending hours in the Louvre and the Musée de Sculpture Comparée (now known as the Musée des Monuments Français).

In the years 1898 to 1900 Despiau exhibited at the Salon des Artistes Français: but in 1901 he bid adieu to the academic world by participating in the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. He was admitted as an Associate of this Society in 1902, and as a full Member in 1904, and until 1923 remained a faithful exhibitor. In that year he exhibited at the Salon d'Automne and at the new Salon des Tuileries, of which he was a founding member and to which he thereafter reserved the presentation of his new work.

Despiau's early work was, understandably, academic. The 1899 Salon, to which he contributed, had such an abundance of drapery incongruously enveloping the figures of contemporary personages that it was nicknamed the 'Dressing-gown Corner'; and Despiau, like others at this time, such as Aimé Jules Dalou, was much interested in the problems of dress, especially modern dress, in statuary. At the Beaux-Arts in the years until 1906 he showed a number of full-length seated figures in contemporary dress with titles like *Spleen* (1902), and *Convalescent* (1903).

It was in the portrait head and the portrait bust that Despiau was to find his true *métier*, however. Here success was slower to arrive and his early portraits are only of his wife, his associates, his friends, and a young girl of his native district. It has been said that at this period he earned a living by colouring postcards. In 1906 he received his first commission – from a Mme Causse – and in the following year, when Despiau was already thirty-three, his works in the Salon finally attracted the attention of August Rodin. After the show Rodin wrote to Despiau to 'give his compliments and invite him to come to see him in his studio at the Dépôt des Marbres'. Like Desbois and Alexandre Charpentier, like Niederhausen-Rodo, Bourdelle and Pompon, like Dejean, Alfred-Jean Halou and Drivier, Charles Despiau was summoned to work for Rodin. He remained a stone-carver for Rodin until 1914.

During these long years of near-apprenticeship, Despiau absorbed Rodin's philosophy of art. He learned to regard sculpture not as a set of predetermined formulae, but as a living art



Bacchanal by Jules Dalou (1838-1902)
Bronze relief, 22 inches in diameter

Dalou, who was a pupil of Carpeaux, although some years older than Despiau exhibited alongside him in the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in the 1890s. Apart from the public monumental figures for which he was

well known, Dalou produced some less formal and more personal works such as the Gallery's *Bacchanal*, whose subject inevitably recalls Renoir. This relief is a reduced version made by Dalou in 1899 from the model he had made in 1891 for his *Fontaine du Fleuriste* in the Garden at Auteuil. The model itself is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and a cast of it is in the Louvre.

concerned with the problem of form. He learned to see and experience nature, not with the eye of a camera, but with the eyes of a sculptor – aware of the structure of the human body, but aware also of the relationship that exists between form and surrounding space. But much in Rodin would be finally rejected: his contempt for the raw materials of his trade, and his essentially romantic, emotional, baroque approach to his subjects, with its overtones of tragedy and pathos, and of pervading, if somewhat obscure, symbolism. Despiau was made of much simpler stuff. His emotions were cool, his approach to his subjects more reserved, less personally involved, the treatment of his material more honest, his method more empirical – requiring as many as sixty sittings from his model – his preferred medium modelling in pliant plaster, rather than carving in rigid stone. Despiau would never found a school, would never have young sculptors working for him.

In his determination to be his own master he was following in the footsteps of Lucien Schnegg. This sculptor, despite his premature death in

1909 at the age of forty-five, had considerable influence on the younger French sculptors. His work was always planned with the material to be employed in mind – a doctrine that Eric Gill in later years would term 'truth to material' and one that would affect the work of such British sculptors as Frank Dobson, Jacob Epstein and Henry Moore. Schnegg's volume surfaces are smooth and the planes sharply contrasted. Like Cézanne he tended to treat form in terms of its basic geometry.

Except in his earlier portraits, Despiau rarely employed smooth surfaces: but in that long series of portrait heads that forms his major achievement there is that same tendency, not so much to reduce natural forms to their common geometrical denominators, as we see in the work of Brancusi or Archipenko, as to gently hint at a common geometrical structure. Despiau's heads never become featureless ovoids, but there is a remarkable similarity of structure and feeling throughout almost the entire series of portraits – perhaps because Despiau always chose to depict young women or youths with features unfurrowed by



Drame d'interieur by Emile Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929)
Bronze mask, 24 inches high

With Despiau, Antoine Bourdelle worked in Rodin's studio (he was Rodin's chief assistant for many years) and like him was involved to some degree in the tradition of classical idealism. In Bourdelle's work, however, as in this bronze from the Collection, one can see an inner turmoil, with overtones of romanticism, that reveals his affinities with the Symbolists.

age and undisturbed by emotion. Only in his later works, done during the German occupation of France during World War II, would a more brutal, masculine element appear.

The portrait that Charles Despiau did of Mrs Charles Lindbergh in about 1935 is very typical of his work. Our casting, number four in an edition of five, was acquired in 1971 by the Mackelvie Trust Board. It is signed C. *Despiau* at the base of the neck.

Anne Spencer Lindbergh (née Morrow) is thought of by most people first of all as the wife of Charles Lindbergh, the brave individual who first flew the Atlantic alone and then did so much to foster international and intercontinental air travel. Later she became, in the public eye, the mother of the 'Lindbergh baby' whose kidnapping and brutal murder so shocked the senses of a world to whom 'Lindy' was still a hero. Anne

Morrow Lindbergh, however, is a personality in her own right – essayist, poet, chronicler of their two world tours, gentle philosopher of the Space Age. The volume of diaries and letters, published last year and referring to the period prior to her marriage*, reveals a girl who was shy, yet bubbling with life; a perceptive, pensive girl with the soul of a poet.

Something of this pensive quality is to be seen in Despiau's portrait. Comparison with photographs of Anne Lindbergh taken about the same time shows this to be a true portrait: but anyone viewing the series of portraits as a whole must entertain the suspicion that portraiture, individual portraiture, was not Charles Despiau's prime purpose. His subjects seem to be viewed not as persons, but as ideal types. Perhaps this is because we are not seeing the person at some specific instant of time, with all the expressions and peculiarities proper to that moment, but in that timeless aspect that was achieved in ancient Egyptian portraiture or that was the result of the long exposures necessary in early portrait photography, where the subtle variations of expression over a space of several minutes were evened out on the plate. Despiau's requirement of up to sixty sittings per portrait would probably have had that same effect.

The planes of this head grade imperceptibly into one another so that a constant variation of light is necessary to catch all the subtle nuances of the form. The flesh surfaces receive a gentle modulation of treatment which intermittently catches the light and tends further to disguise the planes of the form. In most of his portraits the hair has the appearance of clinging to the head, with little body of its own. Anne's hair was usually worn swept back like this, but being very soft in texture generally stood out from the head much more.

A Despiau portrait is a generalisation of a certain ideal, a somewhat lyrical vision of a mankind untouched by outward sorrows. One feels that every portrait, whatever the subject, is a self portrait, not of the outward appearance of the artist, but of the inner being – a simple soul from the Landes district.

Despiau died in Paris in 1946, a minor master who by his very nature had little or no effect on the development of modern sculpture. His art was too personal for that.

ERIC YOUNG

**Bring Me a Unicorn*, diary and letters of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, 1922-1928, Chatto and Windus, London, 1972

Les Nourrices au Jardin du Luxembourg Governesses in the Luxembourg Gardens

a pastel by Edouard Vuillard (1868-1940)

This work by the famous French artist is the generous gift of Mr and Mrs Robert F. Rothschild, of New York City and New Zealand, and was received by the Auckland City Art Gallery in June, 1973. Its size is 23 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 16 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches.

Edouard Vuillard, the famous French painter, was noted most for his portraits and paintings of interiors. His work is always linked with Pierre Bonnard who was also, but not as preponderantly, concerned with depicting interiors with figures. The work of the two artists has a similarity of outlook without either man's work being tributary to the other's. French critics of the time tended to speak of Vuillard as an 'intimist' painter because of his frequent choice of interiors where he took his vantage point very much within the room. Only rarely, in these paintings, did he choose views that include a landscape as seen through a window. In the early part of his career and in his later years he painted, in the mood of the times and most often for decorative purposes, outdoor scenes, frequently arrested by visual barriers of trees, as the composition plunges towards a wide horizon. His port scenes and occasional seascapes are unusual departures from his narrow and rich close-up views and intimate portraits at short range.

The present work is a study of an outside subject but it is conceived without any opening of deep perspective. Although the date of the work has not, as yet, been clearly established it seems safe to place it between 1896 and 1903-1904. What Vuillard has done here is to adapt to his own vision the flowing curves and untraditional composition of the Art Nouveau and Jugendstil which invaded the concepts of major artists in



France and in Germany. For a few short years virtually all of the more gifted painters in Europe responded, each in his own fashion, to these pervasive styles.

Hence, this rich and revealing work not only bears the imprint of a major talent but refers, as well, to a significant period in the history of modern art. The generosity of the donors who have withdrawn this pastel permanently from their fine collection, for the benefit of the New Zealand public, is to be deeply admired.

Beach scene: a collage by Judith Rothschild
Mr and Mrs Robert F. Rothschild added to their splendid gift yet another, namely a collage entitled *Beach scene* by Judith Rothschild, now proudly exhibited at the entry of the Mackelvie Gallery. This work (20 x 30 ins) is in bright tones and bold outlines. It is not a simple work because the artist, using simple means, is anything but simplistic. She has studied colour theories in depth; she has studied method and intuition in transposing musical analogies to painting and her composition here is, as a result, the outcome of thoughtful choices which have led the artist on a path between strict discipline and intuitive composition.

M. T. WOOLLASTON

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Any member of the public is eligible for membership. Members are invited to previews of exhibitions arranged by the Art Gallery, to lectures, discussions, film evenings, and social functions arranged by the Associates. Regular newsletters are sent out, and Members also receive the Art Gallery's *Quarterly*. Further information can be obtained from the Honorary Secretary, C/o Auckland City Art Gallery.

The *Quarterly* is published by the Auckland City Art Gallery and is concerned primarily with presenting information about works of art acquired by the Gallery. Subscriptions: \$2.00 a year; single copies 50 cents; free to members of the Auckland Gallery Associates.

Printed by Wakefield Press Limited, 34 Wakefield Street, Auckland 1.

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